



A Study on Public Distribution System of Assam

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Abstract

The Public Distribution System of India is perhaps the largest distribution system in the world. It is a major instrument of the Government to ensure availability of food grain at an affordable and reasonable price to ensure food security to the poor i.e. who are nutritionally at risk. It is an important constituent of the strategy of poverty reduction of the Government of India and serve as a safety net for the poor. Both the Central and State Governments jointly undertake the responsibility of operating PDS. In Assam, the Food and Civil Supplies Department takes the responsibilities of allocation and distribution of food grains, identification of families below the poverty line, issue of ration cards, supervision and monitoring of stock position and distribution of food articles, etc. by the fair price shops. The study aims to know the performance of schemes of the Public Distribution System under the Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes, and under the State sector in recent years in Assam. The study is descriptive in nature using secondary data collected from publications of the Government, research articles, websites, etc.

Keywords: Public Distribution System, central and state sectors, etc.

1. Introduction:

India is a welfare state with the objective of growth, social justice, and improvement in living standards of the people. The country wants the availability of quality food grains to the public at reasonable prices. The Public Distribution System (PDS) is a major instrument of the Government to ensure the availability of food grain at an affordable price and to ensure food security to the poor, thereby helping to eradicate poverty. The Public Distribution System ensures food and nutritional security of the nation. It stabilizes food prices and makes it available to the poor at affordable prices. It maintains the buffer stock of food grains in the warehouses so that food becomes available at less agricultural production period. It also helps in the redistribution of food grain from surplus regions to deficient regions of food production of the country. The system of minimum support price and procurement helps in increasing food grain production. The Public Distribution System of India is perhaps the largest distribution system of the world. The Public Distribution System of India is an initiative administered by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution. It is an important constituent of the strategy of poverty reduction of the Government of India and serves as a safety net for the poor who are nutritionally at risk, stabilizing the open market price of food grains. PDS began during World War 11 and expanded in the 1960s after the establishment of the Agricultural Prices

Commission and Food Corporation of India (FCI) to address food shortages. By the 1970s, the PDS evolved into a universal scheme for the distribution of subsidized food. Till 1992, PDS was a general entitlement scheme for all consumers without any specific target. Both Central and State Governments jointly undertake the responsibility of operating PDS. In June 1992, the Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) was launched to strengthen food security to remote, hilly and inaccessible areas of the country. In June 1997, Targeted Public Distribution System was introduced, focusing on the poor. In December 2000, Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) was launched to reduce hunger among the poorest segments of Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. Both the Central and State Governments jointly share the responsibility for procurement, storage, transportation, and distribution of the commodities to the consumers through PDS network involving the Wholesale Consumer Co-Operative Society (WCCS), Gaon Panchayat level Samabai Samity (GPSS), Fair Price Shop (FPS), and Large Scale Multipurpose Co-operative Society (LAMPS). The centre procures food grains from farmers at a minimum support price and sells it to the states at central issue prices. The centre takes the responsibility of transporting the grain to godowns to each state. States bears the responsibility of transporting the food grains from godowns to the fair price shop from where the beneficiaries purchase the food grains at the lower central issue price. In Assam, the Food and Civil Supplies Department takes the responsibilities of allocation and distribution of food grains, identification of families below the poverty line, issue of ration cards, supervision and monitoring of stock position and distribution of food articles, etc. by the fair price shops. The Food and Civil Supplies Department also takes the responsibility of procurement of paddy and rice under the 'Minimum Support Price' scheme under the 'Food Management Policy' of the Ministry of Food and public Distribution of Government of India to ensure remunerative prices to the producers for their agricultural produce and to provide the procured food grains to the consumers fairly at reasonable and affordable price.

2. Objectives:

The study is based on the objectives-

- 1) To know the Public Distribution Schemes under the Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes in recent years in Assam
- 2) To study the Public Distribution Schemes under the State Sector in recent years in Assam

3. Methodology:

The study is descriptive in nature using secondary data collected from publications of the Government, research articles, websites, etc.

4. Discussion:

4.1: Public Distribution Schemes under Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes in recent years in Assam:

4.1.1 National Food Security Act, 2013:

National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 is a landmark act of India which provides subsidies for food grains to approximately one thirds population of the country, signed into law on 12th September, 2013, effective retroactively from 5 July, 2013. It is a paradigm shift in the approach to food security from welfare-based approach to rights-based approach. The Act legally entitles upto 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban

population to receive subsidized food grains under the Targeted Public Distribution System. The Act wants the empowerment of women, and according to this law, the eldest woman of the household of 18 years or above is mandated to be the head of the household for issuing the ration cards. The Act is being implemented in all the States/Union Territories, and all India basis, out of maximum coverage of 81.34 persons, around 80 crore persons have been covered under NFSA at present for receiving highly subsidized food grains. The identification of beneficiaries is a continuous process which includes exclusion of fake/duplicate/intelligible ration cards, and for death and migration, etc. and inclusion for birth and also that of genuine left-out households. It guarantees affordable access to adequate, quality food and provides maternity benefits, ensures dignified food access for vulnerable groups through the Public Distribution system. The scheme integrates schemes like the Midday Meal and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The goals of NFSA are to ensure food and nutritional security across the human life cycle, provide food at affordable prices for a life with dignity and strengthen the Public Distribution System (PDS).

National Food Security Act, (NFSA), 2013 was launched in Assam in 2015 in the month of December. As per the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) Control Order, 2015, the targeted number of beneficiaries under NFSA, 2013, in the State is 25189775. The Government fixed the target of 84.17% in respect of rural areas and 60.35% in respect of urban areas on the basis of 2011 census report. Beneficiaries of NFSA are categorized into Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households (poorest), and Priority Households (PHs), selected AAY families get 35 kg of rice per Ration Card per month while selected Priority Household families get 5 kg of rice per member of the family per month.

As per online allocation report of NFSA Rice, for the month of November, 2024, total of 6702054 families of AAY and PH with total population of 23069461 have been selected as beneficiaries under NFSA.

The dispatch of the fund in respect of Transportation and Commission cost of Rice under NFSA in the last four years (Both Central and state share) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1:

Dispatch of the fund in respect of Transportation and Commission cost of Rice under NFSA

Year	Transportation Cost (in Rs.)	Commission Cost (in Rs.)
2020-21	1878089160	2267782840
2021-22	2172937316	2331743975
2022-23	2276807715	3738107466
2023-24	1567274289	2609597362

Source: Economic survey, Assam, 2024-25

4.1.2 Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana Scheme:

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas introduced Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) in May 2016, as a flagship programme to make clean cooking fuel such as LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) available to the rural and deprived households which were otherwise using traditional cooking fuels like firewood, coal, cow-dung cake, etc. The scheme was launched on 1st May, 2016 in Uttar Pradesh by Prime Minister, N. Modi. The scheme provides free LPG connections to Below Poverty Line (BPL) households on the basis of Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC data base) exercise initiated in 2011. The

scheme is implemented in Assam in the month of May, 2017, Oil Marketing Companies being the Nodal Agencies for implementation of the scheme through the State of Assam. The women under BPL are beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana Scheme. Table 2 shows target, achievements and funds released to Oil Marketing Companies from 2017-18 to 2023-24 in Assam.

Table 2:
Target, achievements and funds released to Oil Marketing Companies

Year	Target	Achievement against target	Fund released to OMCs (in Rs.)
2017-18	1065603	1128137	1005946920
2018-19	1552525	1425537	1411281630
2019-20	1430000	991719	981801810
2020-21	Nil	Nil	Nil
2021-22	Nil	Nil	Nil
2022-23	Nil	178906	Nil
2023-24	Nil	678055	Nil

Source: Economic survey, Assam, 2024-25

Table 2 reflects that the highest amount of funds was released to Oil Marketing Companies in 2018-19. The Government of Assam has paid to the Oil Marketing Companies Rs. 990 per beneficiary.

4.1.3 Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) is a food security welfare scheme of the Government of India, launched in the month of April, 2020; operated by the Department of Food and Public Distribution under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution. The scheme aims to feed the poorest citizens of India by providing grain through the Public Distribution System to all the families of Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Priority Households. Under the scheme, the Government of India provided free rice 5 kg per person per month for both AAY and PH card holder families covered under NFSA till December 2022 in addition to the regular quota of NFSA rice. Government of India continued the PMGKAY Scheme by merging the scheme with the National Food Security Act-2013 from January 2023 and has provided 35kg of rice per AAY cardholder family and 5 kg of rice per month per person for Priority Household Cardholder families covered under NFSA,2013 at free of cost from January 2023 onwards.

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana is a fully centrally sponsored scheme without financial involvement of the State Government. The dispatch of fund in respect of Transportation and Commission cost of Rice under PMGKAY is shown in table 3.

Table 3:

Dispatch of funds in respect of Transportation and Commission cost of Rice under PMGKAY

Year	Transportation Cost (in Rs.)	Commission Cost (in Rs.)
2020-21	122600000	122600000
2021-22	1625267276	1624295580
2022-23	1323759152	2577350888
2023-24	Nil	Nil

Source: Economic survey, Assam, 2024-25

4.1.4 One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC):

One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC), a national Ration Card portability scheme was launched on 30th June 2020 across the country to ensure food security for all, including internal migrants within India. It enables the migrant worker and their family members to access public Distribution System benefits from any Fair Price Shop anywhere in the country. Assam is the 36th State to implement the One Nation One Ration Card scheme. The scheme is implemented in all 36 States/ Union Territories to make the food security portable throughout the country. Assam was on-boarded on the ONORC platform in June, 2022.

The scheme has two components as

- 1) Installation of e^{POS} (Electronic point of sale) devices at Fair Price Shops
- 2) Aadhaar Seeding of NFSA Beneficiaries

Under the scheme, all ration cards and beneficiaries are linked to their Aadhaar numbers. All Fair Price Shops are equipped with electronic point of sale machines. Beneficiaries use their /biometric data at any Fair Price Shop to claim their share. Online transactions of food grains are being done through installed e^{POS} and Aadhaar authenticated online transactions have been made mandatory by the State Government.

4.2 Public Distribution Schemes under State Sector in Assam:

4.2.1 Amar Dukan:

The Amar Dukan scheme was launched by the Minister of Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs Department on 24th December, 2019, at the Rabindra Bhawan, Guwahati, to prevent the rise in price and to help poor consumers from the burden of increased prices of essential consumer goods. The Fair Price Shop (license) holder is eligible for the scheme; the District Commissioner/Councils Head select the Fair Price Shop (license) holder for the Amar Dukan scheme. At present, 5623 Amar Dukans are functioning in different districts of Assam and provide 23 essential commodities under the scheme, 22 non- PDS commodities and 1 PDS Iodized Salt. The consumers can purchase the commodities from Amar Dukan at a price less than the open market. The goods provided by Amar Dukan are rice, branded/premium rice, sugar, gur, pulses (masur dal), moong dal, packaged iodized salt (Tata, Nirma, Captain Cook etc.), biscuit and confectionary, packaged atta, packaged maida, packaged suji, toothpaste, bathing and washing soap, packaged tea (Tata, Golaghat, Nameri etc.), spices, packaged ghee, packaged butter, chana gota, moong gota, potato, onion, edible oil, and PDS iodized salt.

4.2.2 Amar Dukan on Wheels:

The Government of Assam has introduced the new scheme Amar Dukan on Wheels in 2017-18 with a view to generate employment to educated un-employed youth and to prevent the price rise of essential commodities. The scheme aims to provide essential commodities to the consumers at reasonable price, lesser than the prevailing market price. The Government of Assam has fixed a Target of 200 Amar Dukan on Wheels in 2017-18. The Government has decided to appoint 1000 Amar Dukan on Wheels throughout the state and to provide Rs. 50000 to the selected beneficiaries who distribute essential commodities to the consumers at lesser price.

4.2.3 Samabai Sabalikiran Yojana:

Government of Assam, Food and Public Distribution Department has introduced Samabai Sabalikiran Yojana from 1st April, 2021 for granting of financial assistance to GPSS/WCCS/LAMPS of the State for service rendered by them in the supply chain management of food grains (NFSA Rice), Rs.26.35/- per quintal.

4.2.3 Affordable Nutrition and Nourishment Assistance Scheme

The Government of Assam launched Affordable Nutrition and Nourishment Assistance Scheme in April, 2019 to provide rice free of cost to the Tea Garden beneficiaries of both AAY and PHH categories and Rs. 1 per kg to other than Tea Garden beneficiaries of both AAY and PHH categories. Later on, from April, 2020, Government has decided to provide free rice to all the beneficiaries covered under NFSA.

5. Conclusion:

Food is one of the basic necessities of life for human beings. A healthy and balanced diet is required to build a strong nation. Both the Central government and the State Government of Assam have distributed the food grain to the consumers at affordable and reasonable price through the Public Distribution System, thereby ensuring food security, helps to eradicate poverty by helping the poor.

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